

From: Alpern, Michael [Alpern.Michael@epa.gov]
Sent: 2/7/2020 5:31:28 PM
To: Munoz, Charles [munoz.charles@epa.gov]; Hage, Christopher [hage.christopher@epa.gov]
Subject: Exchange via the press on RA situation

If you haven't yet seen...

EPA Says Ex-Region 9 Chief Was Incompetent, Abused Travel

BY STEPHEN LEE

Feb. 7, 2020, 9:08 AM

[Listen](#)

- Relieved for 'severe neglect and incompetent administration'
- Former chief says allegations are '100% untrue'

The EPA has fired back against its former chief in California, Nevada, and Arizona, accusing him of incompetence and abuse of travel privileges.

In response, Michael Stoker, former Environmental Protection Agency Region 9 administrator, told Bloomberg Law that the agency's allegations are "100% untrue" and challenged EPA political officials to take a lie detector test.

Stoker also said it's "more likely than not" that he will file a libel lawsuit against the agency over the allegations.

The quarrel is highly unusual at the EPA, which traditionally maintains cordial relationships with political appointees who leave or are dismissed from the agency.

Stoker was abruptly fired Wednesday morning. After earlier declining to provide reasons for his dismissal, the EPA said late Thursday night he was let go for traveling too much at the agency's expense without any business purpose.

"Although travel and accessibility to state partners in an important and expansive region like the southwest is vital, Mike was too interested in travel for the sake of travel and ignored necessary decision making required of a regional administrator," Corry Schiermeyer, an EPA spokeswoman, said in an email.

"Although EPA leadership repeatedly requested Mike to simply conduct the basic responsibilities of his job, we regretfully and ultimately after many requests had to relieve him for severe neglect and incompetent administration of his duties," Schiermeyer said. "His excuses and stories are simply all made up, and we cannot allow them to go without response."

His EPA calendar, dating back to the start of his tenure in March 2018, lists events in cities such as Phoenix, Albuquerque, Las Vegas, Seattle, Honolulu, and Washington. The calendar also includes events in American Samoa, Palau, Guam, Saipan, and Tijuana, Mexico. All the listed events also describe EPA-related business.

Schiermeyer also said all regional administrators "work in a bipartisan way in their regions." That comment is an apparent reference to a comment Stoker made in a letter to Region 9 staff about an EPA political staffer telling him "it wasn't going unnoticed how many Democrat members in Congress were commending me for the job I was doing."

'An Outright Lie'

Stoker responded that, when he was interviewed by former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and recently departed Chief of Staff Ryan Jackson, both men specifically asked him if he would be willing to spend large amounts of time away from the office and traveling throughout the region, which also spans Hawaii, the Pacific Islands, and 148 federally recognized tribes.

"They said, 'We want a regional administrator who's going to be out in the field where the problems are. Are you willing to do that?'" Stoker said. "I have never had a conversation ever about my schedule. Nobody has ever talked to me about ratcheting down my schedule."

Stoker called the EPA's statement "an outright lie."

"I will take a polygraph test and they can provide whoever they want in HQ to take a polygraph test," he said. "Whoever they provide will flunk that test."

Stoker was chairman of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Board from 1995 to 2000, and California deputy secretary of state from 2000 to 2002. He also served as director of government affairs for UnitedAg, California's second-largest agricultural association.

Deborah Jordan, a longtime career EPA official, will become the agency's acting deputy regional administrator, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler wrote in an email to employees.

In a letter to Region 9 employees, Stoker said that "too many clashes between myself and leadership in HQ over policy and non-policy items (when I was given advance notice which often was not the case) ultimately played a significant role" in the EPA's decision.

Sent from my iPhone